Mobile Media and Its Impacts on Social Change and Human Rights in North Korea

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This study attempts to elucidate social change and human rights situations in North Korea by examining the use of media by North Korean citizens. In particular, mobile media that has recently become available to the public will be the focus of the study. Although mobile media is viewed as a symbol of the increasing openness of North Korean society to the world, it is highly controlled by the North Korean political authorities in terms of availability and accountability. Moreover, mobile media are used as tools for public management and propaganda. The discourse analysis is conducted to examine the use of mobile media and its impact on social changes in North Korea. In-depth interviews with mobile users were conducted by recruiting North Korean defectors who used mobile media while they were in North Korea. The result of this research demonstrates the impacts of mobile technology on social changes and human rights in North Korea.

Keywords: North Korean mobile media, digital culture, youth culture, human rights in North Korea, discourse analysis

By the end of 2018, North Korean topics had become some of the most outstanding news of the year. Images of North Korean leader Kim Jong-un crossing the demilitarized zone between South and North Korea and of a hand shake between United States President Donald Trump and Kim at a summit in Singapore were continuously broadcast by media worldwide. The photogenic gestures of Kim Jong-un during summit meetings with President Trump and with South Korean President Moon Jae-in led world audiences to reconsider the stature of North Korea, a country once perceived as part of the axis of evil and an Orwellian *Animal Farm* ruled by a pseudo cult for three generations. In addition to these historical meetings, the ordinary life of the North Korean people became visible to the world when President Moon visited Pyongyang. The world was surprised to see sky-high buildings and people using mobile phones in the streets of Pyongyang in the same manner as people in other countries. This was a contrast from previous images of North Korea, which broadcasted belligerent marching soldiers in Kim Il-Sung Plaza and crying mobs genuflecting toward the dictator while waving flowers. Attitudes toward the hermit kingdom began to change, accomplishing the North Korean leader's goal to make the country appear normal to outside observers.

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The focus of this study is to examine the use of mobile technology in the context of social changes and human rights in North Korea. Patterns of mobile uses can disclose changes happening inside this hermit kingdom because mobile technology has been a symbol of openness in other parts of the world. Theoretically, the concept of governance is adopted to examine the use of mobile technology and its impact on social change in North Korea. Methodologically, discourse analysis will be applied. In-depth interviews with North Korean defectors are conducted to contextualize the patterns of mobile use in conjunction with social change and cultural practices in North Korea.

Mobile Media and Technological Governance in North Korea

North Korea is one of the closed societies in the world, and no one knows what really goes on inside. Yet the hermit kingdom continues to be unveiled little by little due to changes in the lives of ordinary people. The two most relevant changes occurring in North Korea are the adoption of the market system and technological advancement. It has been a generation since the country adopted a market system, and a decade has passed since mobile technology was first disseminated among the North Korean people. The market system and mobile technology are intertwined, and together promote rapid development in North Korea. Although there are statistical discrepancies due to a lack of information about life inside North Korea, up to 4 million mobile subscribers have been commonly reported to exist in North Korea, which means that 15% of the total population of North Korea owns a mobile phone ('Norh Korean phone,' 2018; B. Kim, 2017; 'Oracom,' 2018).

Mobile technology can be a means to direct either opening the society or enforcing political domination, and technological governance can be a barometer to gauge changes in North Korea. Theoretically, however, technological governance brings up contestable issues in applying to social changes in North Korea. First, it is contestable to apply the theory of governance to authoritarian countries such as North Korea. Governance theory is a tool meant to explicate new public domains that become more and more participatory and interactive as the roles of diverse agents expand without governmental oversight in the 21st century (Rhodes, 1996; Rosenau, 1995). Theoretical debates come from the fact that the founders of this theory did not necessarily define governance as intrinsically good. Kooiman (2002) defines governance as "all those interactive arrangements in which public as well as private actors participate aimed at solving societal problems" (p.73). This aspect of the theory has ignited debates about the guiding rules of good governance among theorists.

In these debates, the two most important aspects of governance—public participation and democracy—are contested among various nations and systems by claiming that good governance cannot be attributed only to a certain time and geography (i.e., the 21st century and liberal democracy in the West). Socialist countries in Asia and South America have recently cited theories of governance to explain their public administrations, claiming that they are exemplars of good governance because socialist countries have promoted public participation and democracy since the beginning of the socialist revolution (Nelson, 2019; Seesaghur, 2015; Zhu & Peters, 2018). Because of these theoretical and political debates, theories of governance have become more muddled and diversified than ever before (Fukuyama, 2013; Ginosar, 2013; Karppinen & Hallvard, 2011).

In light of disputes and the limits of governance theory, a new perspective is necessary to broaden the scope of study and to define complex natures of public participations in governance (Doges, 2007; Nye & Donahue, 2000). There have been various efforts to broaden the scope of governance theory beyond institutional and neo-institutional limits by adopting diverse sociological and philosophical theories. Because the main point of governance theory is to look at changes in public life based on the public participation by extra agents other than bureaucratic procedures, broader social practices and nongovernmental organizations are necessary to be studied. However, these studies still focus on changes in institutions and rules rather than transformation of the society as a whole while looking at public participation and social practices (Giddens, 1984; Pierre, 2000; Stoker, 1998; Wendt, 1992).

This study attempts to explore Foucault's theoretical framework to broaden the limits of governance theory because Foucault highlights the broad spectrum of governing practices and the ambivalent nature of public participation in governance. Although Foucault does not use the term "governance," he denotes public participation in the construction of power in both negative and positive senses by using the term "governmentality." This distinction resonates with the fundamental meaning of governance. Foucault defines "government, resulting, on the one hand, in the formation of a whole series of specific governmental apparatuses, and, on the other, in the development of a whole complex of saviors" (Burchell, Gordon, & Miller, 1991, pp. 102–103). Foucault's notion of governmentality highlights how authority is discursively formed in light of power/knowledge schemes practiced by the society as a whole in the sociohistorical milieu. Although Foucault's theory has not been fully developed for the study of governance, it can help to overcome theoretical disputes about the guiding rules of governance (Amos, 2010; Bresford, 2003). Foucault's perspective on governance and its potential for explaining the ambivalent nature of public participation will be applied to explain the complexity of social changes and new media uses in North Korean society.

Second, theoretical controversy has been brought up on the notion of technological governance. "Technology" is a term surrounded by misunderstanding and disputes among Foucault's notions because Foucault applies an idiosyncratic definition of "technology" distinctly from those in daily use that concern arenas such as machines and crafts. Foucault sees technology as comprising mechanisms that "always bear upon a material, an epoch, a body of determined practices and discourses" (Foucault, 1987, p. 49). In an interview, Foucault identified mechanisms of technology that constitute subjects and power/knowledge as technologies of production, technologies of sign systems, technologies of power, and technologies of the self (Foucault, 1988, p. 17).

Although Foucault's concept of technology is different from the ordinary meaning, it is arguable whether his notion excludes material techniques from affecting human subjects and political domination. Many studies influenced by Foucault examine this material sense of technology, and public surveillance in relation to information and communication technology is one of the fruitful topics of Foucauldian researches (Donner, 1980; Dumm, 1996; Foster, 2003; Gandy, 1993; Gilliom & Monahan, 2013; Lyon, 2006). Such studies attempt to explain how technological development suppresses individuals by citing the notion of panopticon (Foucault, 1977). This study also focuses on mobile technology as a means to direct social change and/or domination in North Korea.

Technological governance of mobile phones in North Korea has been developed roughly through three phases; the first adoption period in the late 2000s, the second phase of wide dissemination period until 2013, and the last phase of high-tech advancement of mobile technology and at the same time tight control over its use up to now. North Korea first established a mobile system in early 2000 and provided test service in Pyongyang. Public dissemination of mobile phones began in 2008, when the North Korean telecommunication system initiated a joint venture with Egyptian company Orascom ('Secretive North Korea,' 2008; 'Mobile penetration,' 2009). This system offered a 3G-based technology called Koryo Link. The number of subscriptions increased to 1 million in 2011 (H. Kim, 2017), less than three years after introduction of the service. In the same year, the North Korean government allowed a second mobile carrier, KangsongNet, as an organ of the Workers' Party of Korea (Chosun Rodong Dang) to compete with Orascom. In 2015, another mobile carrier, Byol ("Star" in Korean) began conducting business. North Korea therefore currently has three mobile carriers ('Mobile communication,' 2018; Warf, 2015).

The North Korean telecommunication agency Chaeshinbu (CSB) exercises strict control over mobile use in North Korea. CSB has manufactured national cell phone products since 2011, although it is suspected that these units represent simple reassembly of foreign products mostly imported from China (M. Kim, 2015). Currently, North Korean smart phones are available in series of Arirang- and Pyongyang-branded products. People in North Korea are only allowed to buy phones registered to the CSB, and it is illegal for people to buy and use foreign mobile phones ('North Korea, fearing,' 2018; H. Kim, 2017). Moreover, mobile users cannot modify their phones with applications and download or erase any program. New apps on smart phones become available only when users physically bring their phones to CSB and obtain apps from officers at CSB centers.

North Korea had originally implemented looser control of mobile media up to the second phase until 2013 than now, so that users were able to modify applications and to share contents with other users. During the third period since 2013, North Korea has implemented tighter governance of mobile uses by developing its own OS, Bulgen Byol ("Red Star" in Korean), which is able to ban illegal applications and to log a user's history of mobile use (Park, 2013; Seo, 2016). The governmental control of mobile uses has become even tighter using this new OS. Massive arrests of individuals who used mobile phones "illegally" have occurred from time to time under Kim Jong-un's rule (Han, 2015). Governance of mobile technology has become more and more tightly controlled in North Korea, ironically when technology is advancing and its rate of mobile use is increasing.

Internet use is strictly forbidden in North Korea. According to the 2018 Digital Report, jointly conducted by British and Canadian NGOs, North Korea used about 1,000 IP addresses in 2018. These are strictly limited to use for diplomacy and training purposes. North Korea is reported to have the lowest Internet use in the world at 0.06% of the total population, compared with the world average of 53% ('Land lines,' 2018; 'Dramatic increase,' 2018). In lieu of Internet access, North Korea has created a national intranet, Kwangmyong ("Brilliant Light" in Korean), for domestic networking through which online shopping and foreign currency transactions have been introduced ('New smart phone,' 2018; 'Delivery orders' 2018; 'Net accessed,' 2017).

Thus, while the dissemination of mobile media in North Korea is continuously increasing, the technological governance of mobile media is even more tightly controlled. It is probably overly optimistic to envision mobile media as a vehicle for greater openness, much less to bring on a North Korean version of the Arab Spring. North Korean barriers to outside influence remain intact despite technological development.

Mobile Media and Social Change in North Korea

Because North Korea is one of the most closed societies in the world, this study conducted in-depth interviews with North Korean defectors to probe their experiences with using mobile media. Testimonies of North Korean defectors have contributed to drawing a more accurate picture of reality on the ground in North Korean society compared with previous studies that focused on political affairs released by public agencies. The weakness, however, is that studies of North Korean defectors tend to highlight the most devastating situations that people have experienced in North Korea, in part because of ideological bias in academia and among people in general. Because some North Korean defectors adjust their testimonies to this ideological stance and others had preexisting ideological orientations, North Korean studies are not entirely free from preconceptions of North Korean society.

Interview Procedures

Considering both strengths and weaknesses of recruiting North Korean defectors, I conducted in-depth interviews with defectors to examine the use of mobile media and its impact on the daily lives of North Korean people. Surveys or attempts to research on the surface level will not show the real situations in North Korea because of ideological and personal bias of defectors even though they are sole informants who witnessed reality in this closed society. It is risky to make any generalizations solely on the responses of defectors without getting into the deeper meaning. Hence, in-depth interviews for an extensive time was attempted, and the results of interviews are presented in larger theoretical and sociohistorical contexts using discourse analysis.

Among numerous traditions of discourse analysis, ranging from functionalist linguistics, social semiology, to Foucauldian poststructuralism (Barker & Galasinski, 2001; Fairclough, 1989; Kress & Hodge, 1979; van Dijk, 1997), this research uses mainly poststructuralist discourse analysis contingent to Foucault's theory of technological governance. For this discourse analysis, in-depth interviews with North Korean defectors were initiated for an extensive time, and interview statements are contextualized and interpreted in relation to larger systemic changes in North Korea.

The process of discourse analysis started with listening to North Korean defectors' experiences and their feelings and opinions on their own terms. Their statements were fully transcribed and then sorted and compared with internal consistency or inconsistency and to larger social changes in North Korea. In addition to defectors, Chinese business people who have resided in North Korea are interviewed to draw a broader picture of social changes in North Korea from the point of view of foreigners.

Table 1 summarizes demographic information of interview subjects.

Table 1. Interview Subjects.

ID	Age	Gender	Birthplace	Date of immigration to SK	Occupation	Family	Remarks
A	18	F	Pyongyan	2018	None	Single	FM in NK
B	23	F	Hamkyung	2015	Student	Single	M in NK
C	28	F	Hamkyung	2011	Student	M B	
D	27	M	Hamkyung	2013	Student	MS	F in NK
E	26	F	Hamkyung	2015	Business	FM	
F	23	M	Pyongyang	2016	None	Single	
ID	Age	Gender	Nationality	Business in NK (years)	Business	Ethnicity	Business location in NK
1	52	M	Chinese	10 Y (2008–18)	Trade construction supply	Chaoxianzu	Pyongyang
2	51	M	Chinese	8 Y (2010–18)	Steam generator	Chaoxianzu	Najin
3	35	F	Chinese	1 Y (2018)	Lecturer	Chaoxianzu	Pyongyang

Note. Identities of interview subjects undisclosed due to fear of being identified by the North Korean government. Abbreviations: F = female, M = male; for family members, F = father, M = mother, B = brother, and S = sister. NK = North Korea, SK = South Korea.

Although these subjects are not representative of the demographics of North Korean people or of defectors, because the sample is small and not randomly selected, the aim of the study is to examine the deep meanings of daily practices of North Korean people by contextualizing the findings in terms of social and political changes in North Korea. Six interviewees were recruited by making announcements to Internet services used by North Korean defectors. The main interview subjects, identified by letters as A to F, used mobile phones in North Korea or are still using them to contact relatives in North Korea. Subjects 1, 2, and 3 are in a subgroup consisting of Chinese business people who reside and do business in North Korea. An average of three in-depth interviews with each main subject (A–F) were conducted face-to-face for two hours each. Interviews with Subjects 1 and 2 were conducted by teleconference, whereas Subject 3 was interviewed face-to-face for about one hour.

In-depth interviews began with casual conversations in coffee shops or an office, having coffee and cookies in a comfortable atmosphere to construct rapport with interview subjects as much as possible. The interviewer mainly listened, except when she paraphrased the subjects' own statements. All the interview statements were transcribed by typing on a notebook computer and simultaneously recording on a smart phone. Supplemental transcription was made in addition to the pretyped texts right after the interview. Additional notes such as accents, facial and emotional expressions, pauses, hesitations, and mumbling were added in red.

The coding of interview statements was conducted by highlighting keywords in a sort of quantitative measure to identify consistent or inconsistent statements among interview subjects. Also, I wrote memos of thesis statements for each episode that interviewees experienced to compare among interviewees. In addition to coding the statements, mood and modality of interviews are remarked on. Conflicting statements and evading interrogation during interviews are sorted out. After the coding process, follow-up interviews using phones or SNS (Social Network Service) in addition to face-to-face interviews were attempted to clarify interview results.

Mobile Use and Marketization of North Korean Society

The most frequently stated keyword among interview subjects about the use of mobile phones is marketization of North Korean society. All interview participants, A–F, stated that mobile phones are very important for North Koreans who sell merchandise in local markets. Participant E, for example stated the following:

> People have to do business in the market to survive. These people need mobile phones more than TV, refrigerators, or any home appliance. It is expensive to buy a mobile phone, equivalent to one month's living expenses for four family members in North Korea, but still they want the mobile phone for business purposes. I was selling mobile phones at the market. I earned USD$1,000, whereas average vendors got USD$100 a month.

Mobile phones are priced high in North Korea, but are necessary to vend things in local markets. Young people in North Korea in their teens and 20s are referred to as "*Jangmadang saedae*," meaning the market generation, who have no experience with the socialist distribution, system but have grown up in the market system.

Starting in the late 1990s, North Korea became unable to manage distribution systems and therefore gradually accepted the market economy. Smith (2015) challenged the characterization of North Korea as a "hermit kingdom" and detected social and political changes within North Korea that occurred through the market system. A market economy was adopted in North Korea when it suffered a great famine during "the Arduous March" due to natural disasters, the fall of communism in Russia and Eastern Europe, and economic sanctions by the U.S. Since the Communist distribution system was unable to function during this time, people at the bottom of the socioeconomic scale started to adopt market systems for survival. The market system eventually became institutionalized by Kim Jong-un's era (Smith, 2015, pp. 304–319) and is an official part of Kim's economic policy, the so-called double enhancing policy of nuclear strategy and economic development. North Korea has accomplished limited economic growth and has broadened foreign trade with countries in Africa, Asia, and Europe owing to this policy.

In the northern part of North Korea, along the border with China, local markets are especially well-developed, and trade between North Korea and China has been thriving.

B: I started selling things in the market at the age of 13. First, I sold some kinds of homemade medicines since there were a lot of TB patients. The summer season was good for business.

C: I started to market at the age of 13. First, I sold vegetables picked on the mountain. My best earnings were through selling wild mushrooms.

As described by Subjects B and C, women and young people act as vendors in local markets, whereas men work formal jobs mandated by the government while being paid virtually nothing. Young North Koreans often quit school to vend merchandise in the market. They usually start by selling products requiring little investment such as homemade food or wild vegetables, such as the cases of Subjects B and C. The subjects interviewed in this study were vendors in *Jangmadang* (street market) at an early age, 13 or 15 years old, except for Subjects A and F, who are from areas far from the border that are more restrictive to opening business, such as Pyongyang.

According to a survey of North Korean defectors annually conducted by the Korean Ministry of Unification, 80% of defectors had sold products at the market while living in North Korea, and 82% favored individualism over collectivism (B. Kim, 2014). North Korean defectors who participated in this study also stated that local governments often provided land and buildings to vendors to collect taxes from them, which constitute the main revenue streams of local governments. Although some trade items are forbidden, such as foreign media and products made in South Korea (even those are traded informally by covering and washing the brand names, according to interview subjects), the market system is widespread and affects lifestyles of ordinary people in North Korea.

Media, along with the marketization of North Korea, is another factor leading to the opening of North Korean society. It is an open secret that North Koreans watch South Korean TV shows and Hollywood movies daily, despite legal restrictions. The North Korean government may be closed off, but ordinary people are not. They are kept aware of what is going on in the world by watching foreign media daily. A previous study disclosed that 85% of North Koreans secretly enjoy Western media and South Korean TV shows (B. Kim, 2014). Although the study was limited by the group of surveyed North Korean defectors, other studies that recruited samples of 100 North Korean workers in areas near the Chinese border found similar results, suggesting that all respondents watch foreign media (Kang & Park, 2014). North Koreans do not normally share information about their media use with others for fear of severe punishment if caught, but they recognize that all North Koreans consume foreign media, particularly South Korean TV shows and K-pop.

Subtle Means of Resistance and Technological Governance

Although North Korea is opening up because of marketization and the influence of foreign media, the new government under Kim Jong-un is not more accepting of foreign culture and more tolerant of individual freedom. Most defectors testified that watching foreign media is tightly controlled and severely prohibited under Kim Jong-un's rule (Han, 2015; H. Kim, 2017). Foucauldian discourse analysis looks into subtle means of resistance as the source of social changes in the long term rather than grand narratives of social transformation or revolutions that may lead to constructing the same power/knowledge scheme. From this perspective, daily practices of North Koreans, such as watching foreign media and using mobile technology, may demonstrate public resistance to the brutal power of North Korean authority and portray the realistic changes occurring in North Korean society. There seems to be a kind of "Tom and Jerry" situation occurring inside North Korea; the government introduces more and more powerful tools of surveillance while

the people being surveyed continuously adopt the means to avoid government control. First, people employ new technologies to avoid police efforts to limit access to foreign media. Currently, North Koreans often use USB drives and SD cards rather than older media such as DVDs and video tools because they are easy to hide when being investigated. Additionally, Notel, a small energy-efficient notebook computer made in China, targeting the North Korean market, is currently quite popular among North Koreans, who can watch foreign media by simply inserting an SD card, even when electricity is not supplied (B. Kim, 2017).

Another loophole by which North Koreans avoid governmental surveillance is bribery:

D: It is forbidden to watch foreign media, but there we call people idiots if they are arrested because of it. We can just pay a bribe of USD$100 or sho and solve the problem, even in a serious situation.

A: Now there are inspectors on every corner of the street, probably one every 10 meters. They just want to take our money. . . . I was once caught at home and almost given the death penalty when Kim Jong-un wanted to have a model case for punishing foreign media users. Yes, it was this Spring 2018.

As the defectors explained, bribery is pervasive in North Korea. In such a situation, public governance blocking access to foreign media is unable to achieve its goals. In an interview, Subjects A and B stated that they suspected the goal of inspection was to extort money from people instead of regulating foreign media. Although Subject A's testimony illustrates tighter surveillance of media use under Kim Jong-un, his policies do not seem to achieve their goals due to the pervasiveness of bribery.

Third, a more subtle and cultural means to counter public governance of media is related to cultural traditions, particularly patriarchy in North Korea. As North Korea secludes itself from the rest of world and maintains traditional norms, gender discrimination is severe, and women are easily victimized (Hagard & Noland, 2007; Lee, 2001). Human rights issues such as human trafficking and violence against women are detrimental to North Korean women. Besides these criminal aspects, women are disadvantaged in their daily lives. Even in the context of public surveillance, inspectors catch more women than men.

B: Inspectors are afraid of young men because they may seek revenge. Even when boys are caught, they just give the inspectors a cigarette, but we girls have to give a pack of cigarettes or a box.

Accordingly, two young men interviewed in this study, Subjects D and F, showed little fear of inspection and referred to those who are fearful about watching foreign media as idiots or cowards. D even organized gang fights among friends, imitating stories from South Korean dramas, and F frequently held dance parties, playing South Korean idol music during high school. These boys were not afraid of publicly enjoying South Korean media and pop culture among their friends, unlike the girls in this study. This indicates that public surveillance intended to counter the spread of foreign media is less effective because North Koreans use disabling strategies relying on technological, economic, and cultural means.

Mobile technology, however, presents a different picture, and becomes a new method of public surveillance and control. Unlike other media, mobile media is totally controlled by the government, and

users are not able to download any application or run any program besides ones that are legally installed. Although the Internet and international phone calls have always been blocked, people were previously freer to install applications and share foreign contents before the signal change. In 2013, North Korea developed its own OS, Red Star, which was able to block domestic users from installing new applications and to search device records using surveillance technology such as Red Flags and Trace viewers (M. Kim, 2015; Park, 2013; Seliger & Schmidt, 2014).

Additionally, foreign users who participated in this study addressed problems with North Korean mobile technology. They were aware of phone tapping, which had a chilling effect on them while residing in North Korea. Thus, foreigners are not exceptions to public surveillance through the North Korean mobile system although foreigners have access to the Internet using registered IPs provided by the North Korean government.

Human Rights Issues and the Use of Mobile Media

Technological governance in North Korea discloses numerous intrusions of human rights. People are under constant surveillance, and the North Korean government polices every aspect of daily life, including cultural preferences, linguistic accents, and fashions, according to the interview subjects. Foreigners are not excluded from inspections and phone tapping. Mobile technology seems to strengthen the policing in North Korea rather than challenge it.

However, the human rights issues in North Korea are more complex than it first appears. There is no doubt that North Korea is one of the most abusive countries in terms of human rights in the world so that the United Nations (UN) established a special commission for investigating the human rights situation in 2004. The UN General Assembly has passed a resolution titled "Situation of Human Rights in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea" (number 62/167) each year for the last 14 years (Human Right Council, 2014). Additionally, individual countries have proposed human rights acts supporting the North Korean people, including the United States in 2004, Japan in 2006, and South Korea in 2016.

Politicization of Human Right Issues

A major obstacle to efforts by both the UN as a whole and by individual nations is that such actions are highly politicized and contribute less to enhancing human rights in North Korea than to supporting power politics in international relations (Hoffmann, 2011; B. Kim, 2017). U.S. politicians frequently invite North Korean refugees and victims of torture by the North Korean government to the U.S. when political negotiations with North Korea go badly (Hong, 2016). Additionally, political parties in South Korea compete with each other on the issue of North Korean human rights, which required 11 years to pass the act in South Korea. As a result of these political competitions, the South Korean government has switched its positions on UN resolutions as a way of using "carrot and stick" strategies. For example, South Korea abstained from the UN resolution in 2005 to facilitate six-party talks, then changed its position in 2006 when North Korea refused to come to the six-party talks, and again abstained in 2007 when meetings between the South and North Korean ministers were planned (Jung, 2017). Thus, human rights laws have been affected by political situations and international rivalries outside of North Korea.

The second point of dispute about North Korean human rights is that an accurate picture of its human rights situation is difficult to obtain. Although the UN human rights council has appointed delegates to investigate and urged the North Korean government to open its doors each year, the North Korean government has not responded. Alternatively, the UN and individual nations have attempted to examine the situation in North Korea by relying on testimony from North Korean defectors, which has both merits and demerits. Although they are first-hand eyewitness and provide the only information available, North Korean defectors may be also ideologically biased and politically mobilized.

The third problem is that there is no outlet to address North Korean human rights violations by either the UN or national laws. In international contexts, North Korean human rights acts have no compulsive power and serve merely as political proclamations. UN resolutions urge North Korea to come to the international court of justice, and are of course ignored by the North Korean government year after year (Cho, 2016). Moreover, human rights acts reflect bias by portraying the North Korean people as simply victims rather than as active agents to explore solutions to improve situations in North Korea. Because of these problems with North Korean human rights acts, international legal efforts are limited in their ability to offer realistic strategies to help the North Korean people.

Technological Governance and Impediment of Human Rights

Technological governance demonstrates strong cases of disturbing human rights in North Korea. The result of this study illustrates a realistic picture of human rights situations in North Korea. During an interview, Subject A cried as she told the story of her father, who was put in a jail for political criminals simply because of his mobile use.

A: My father is in political criminal jail because he was using a mobile phone to talk to a friend in South Korea. He was caught by the NKCIA in 2015 and sentenced to 20 years in prison. No one can use bribery to avoid punishment for political crimes, while for even murder or any other crime they can.

The tragic story of Subject A's father shows that a successful businessman who had a nice house, a car,[1] and a clean record became a political criminal for life simply for using mobile media. In the interview, Subject A stated that three people, including her father, were arrested together because her father had made phone calls to South Korea and the other two had made calls to their families in the U.S. Bribery was ineffective to allow them to escape punishment for such political crimes. Even though people are aware of such danger, many still make international calls to seek assistance from people in South Korea and elsewhere:

B: I failed my final yesterday because my mom called and asked me to send her some money. She has to go to the Chinese border to rent a Chinese phone from a broker to make a phone call to me. It often takes 3–4 days for her to get to the border areas to make a phone call because public transport

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[1] Under the tight socialist system, no one can own a house or car in North Korea. Companies are allowed to own property and run businesses under the Kim Jong-un's new economic planning, and people can now lease property from companies by paying significant amount of money. According to A, her father bought a nice house and a car under a company's name, which was privileged in North Korea.

is not good there. And she makes a phone call on a mountain, which makes me hurry to send her money, and I was late to my final exam.

C: I cannot help but be poor here in South Korea because I have to send money to North Korea regularly. There is an informal record that North Korean defectors send USD$1.5 million a year to North Korea, which is a large part of its economy. Still, North Korea prohibits our contacts.

As Subjects B and C stated, North Koreans use mobile phones to contact people in South Korea and other foreign countries to receive financial assistance although they know that lifetime punishment in political criminal jail is possible if they are caught. Subject 1, a Chinese businessman, stated that there is a shortage of all domestic supplies because foreign trade is blocked. As the economic situation in North Korea becomes worse, North Koreans desperately need even more assistance from people in other countries.

In an interview, Subject D shared his life experience by saying that his motivation to escape from North Korea was derived from his mobile use. He became a phone broker who leased phones to people who wanted to contact defectors in foreign countries. Phone brokers use Chinese phone signals in border areas to make international calls. Subject D was tempted by the high revenues in this business, and eventually had to leave home after being caught for fear of being a political criminal for life. Ordinary users acknowledge the danger of making international calls, but take such risks in desperate economic situations.

Examinations of technological governance in North Korea show violations of human rights unlike those anywhere else, even in other totalitarian countries that limit Internet access. New media policies and patterns of daily use by people in North Korea suggest violations of human rights and demonstrate detrimental situations in North Korea.

Concluding Remarks

Technological governance in North Korea strengthens the North Korean police state by introducing a new means of public surveillance. Simultaneously, North Korean authorities manage technological governance to promote communist propaganda, and mobile technology is currently a focus of propaganda. Although North Korea remains one of the most orthodox Communist countries in the world, it has developed its own version of Communist ideology called "Juche," which is the most important belief system in North Korea and which has served as the fundamental cornerstone of national governance for three generations, from Kim Il-sung to the current Kim Jong-un regime. The government is educating[2] Juche ideology at school and at home by organizing regular sectional meetings of the entire population and requiring citizens to

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[2] Juche is the political principle of Kim Il-sung, the first political leader of North Korea. "Juche" means independence of a human subjectivity in the Korean language. This is a principle describing the completion of the socialist revolution by willful people mastering their own destinies. Kim emphasized independence from imperialism and argued that a Korean revolution would be different from the traditional socialist revolutions in Russia and China. Juche ideology continues to be the main guiding principle of the North Korean Communist party.

inspect one another. Additionally, media, including broadcasting, films, posters, and print, are all planned and managed by the government to elevate Juche.

The challenge faced by North Korean propaganda is that young people are not interested in ideology and politics, nor do they consume much public media (Yoon, 2015). Among the people interviewed in this study, none regularly watched TV news, and they rarely read newspapers while they lived in North Korea. Additionally, the Chinese businessmen interviewed in this study considered the North Korean media to be 20 or 30 years behind that of China. The Chinese media complex is considered orthodox and totalitarian by the rest of the world, which has characterized the regulations by the "Great Firewall," blocking Internet access to Google, Facebook, and other international sites and screening keywords (Goldsmith & Wu, 2008; J. Kim, 2017). Yet the North Korean media are even more dictatorial compared with other countries limiting Internet access, such as China, Vietnam, Malaysia, and Myanmar, the last of which allows no Internet access, but exercises less severe off-line surveillance than North Korea (Hachigian, 2002; Smith, 2015).

North Korean authorities are aware of the weaknesses of the present propaganda system and have tried to develop strategies to make it more effective for younger generations. Although the North Korean government continues to reinforce the conventional methods of imposing Juche ideology by using education and public media, authorities are enhancing propaganda by developing mobile technology. North Korea stresses "edutainment" programs as a tool to disseminate ideology and is developing a series of e-books and health apps, and *Rodong Sinmun* is currently available on mobile media.

Moreover, the North Korean government creates entertainment programs for mobile devices as an integral part of its propaganda scheme. Among these programs, mobile games are currently popular among young people. North Korea often cites heroic historical stories to promote patriotism among young people. For three generations, Kim's regime has relied on historical legacy as the basis of political legitimacy as described in Juche ideology. Since the first North Korean mobile game, *Legend of Yesong River*, was introduced in 2004, North Korea has used history as a source of entertainment ('The first mobile game,' 2004). In 2015, North Korea created a mobile game version of its most popular animation, *Boy General*, which is a story of heroic warrior living in Goguryeo (BC 37–AD 668), an ancient Korean nation. This became a major role-playing game (RPG) played on North Korean mobile technology ('North Korea's newest,' 2015; 'Popular mobile,' 2015). Besides RPGs, war-themed mobile games continue to be published. Recently 3-D first-person shooting games, designed to battle against imperialist enemies (U.S. and Japan), have become the focus of invention. Regardless of differences in technology and platform, the point of propaganda is similar to all media. The main genre of PC and mobile games is combat revolving around historical narratives, which is an extension of Juche ideology. Young people are trained to be belligerent soldiers and patriots from a very early age through such media and games.

Technological governance in North Korea reinforces surveillance and suppression by promoting both conventional mechanisms of coercion and new techniques of propaganda. Young people who are disinterested in ideology and communist propaganda are exposed to the new strategy of propaganda while enjoying mobile entertainments as technological development and mobile dissemination advances. New propaganda schemes and mobile surveillance of North Korean authorities demonstrate technological means of impeding human rights and reinforcing dictatorial power.

Discourse analysis of mobile technology in North Korea based on in-depth interviews with defectors helps to explain the complexity of technological governance and internal social changes occurring by public participation in media use. However, the results of the study cannot be generalized considering the limited sample size of interview subjects that were not randomly selected. Because North Korea is a particularly closed society, not only internationally but also domestically, people are unaware of news outside their own cities. Interview subjects are not able to speak for North Korean society as a whole or for impacts of mobile technology on social changes in general. Findings of this study may explain only a fragment of North Korean society, and future studies with supplementary cases and subjects are needed. This vision for academic accumulation reflects an epistemological turn of poststructural theories that search for grounded reality on a deeper level through fragmented results instead of claiming the objective truth in generalization. Despite methodological limitation, discourse analysis of this study presents a realistic picture of this closed society by examining concrete experiences of ordinary people with new technology and contextualizing it in a larger social and cultural milieu.

Through new governance of mobile technology, North Korean people are, on one hand, internalizing power and hegemony while enjoying digital entertainment and normalizing the use of mobile media. On the other hand, people are resisting political authority through mundane practices and subtle means of resistance, such as consuming foreign media, connecting to international networks, bribing public agents, and disobeying customs and ideology, all of which are legally prohibited in North Korea. Thus, mobile media simultaneously provides people in North Korea with threats and opportunities. People are more tightly controlled by new methods of surveillance and propaganda schemes as mobile technology advances. At the same time, North Koreans explore new ways of networking with each other and the rest of the world using these technologies, even though doing so is prohibited and threatened.

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